

characters such as the ineffectual hair-dresser in *The Rock*, which was seen by more people in its opening weekend than saw *Flirting* during its entire run.

"I went to the premiere of *The Rock* out on Alcatraz with all the executives of Disney and all of the stars," says *Tales of the City* author Armistead Maupin. "I watched everybody wildly laughing at the cowardly fag. They were reaffirming the notion that homosexuals aren't real men."

Resistance to characters that confound stereotypes and to sexually explicit gay scenes is especially evident, producers say, at the front end of script development. When Warner Bros. announced in 1979 that it was making the film version of *Tales of the City*, Maupin thought he would see his work on the screen by the following year. But Warner Bros. dropped *Tales*, and other studios were cool to Maupin's uncompromising vision for the project. "I was repeatedly told that any physical manifestation of gay love would be out of the question," says Maupin. "I found that unacceptable. So I had to wait nearly 15 years until a foreign company [Britain's Channel Four] would present the story as it had actually been written."

The hostility came from some surprising quarters. "I invariably met with resistance from fags," Maupin says. "My experience with Hollywood has been that homosexuals in power are always the most cautious about homosexual subject matter."

More than a decade later, director Kevin Dowling found that the large studios' inclination to censor gay material was reinforced by layers of middle management. While trying to make the film version of the play *The Sum of Us*—the story of a handsome gay-boy-next-door and his overly accepting father—Dowling initially tried to take the project to a Hollywood studio. "We had a meeting with these three young guys," he recalls. "They were identical, like Cub Scouts in suits. They were raising these objections, and I thought, *This explains something*. There is a whole cadre of people at the studios whose job is to make sure that not too many things get through. If we had agreed to rewrite the script, they would have found something else."

Indeed, one of the first things a studio does after it buys a script is set

about rewriting it. During this process gay material is often pulled. For example, this winter's hit *Up Close & Personal* underwent nearly 30 rewrites, which stripped the script of virtually all its gay content. The movie was originally based on the Jessica Savitch biography *Golden Girl*, which includes accounts of the late anchorwoman's close relationship with a group of lesbian women and the suicide of her gay husband. Other books with strong gay content, such as *The Man Without*

a Face, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, and *The Color Purple*, had their characters' sexuality neutered when Hollywood brought them to the big screen.

If gay content makes it through the script gauntlet, it may yet be censored by producers and directors—even gay-friendly ones—who say they want to ensure that the movie does not alienate straight audiences. Randal Kleiser, the openly gay director of *It's My Party*, admits he cut a love scene near the beginning in an effort to keep

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Several years earlier Jonathan Demme made a similar calculation with *Philadelphia*, and the wager paid off. *Philadelphia*'s breathtaking success—the movie has grossed nearly \$200 million worldwide—showed that realistic, if de-sexualized, gay characters *could* play central roles in blockbuster films. "I think we could have been much bolder

Advocate POLL

Filmmakers censor realistic gay content from major movies because they say it will alienate mass audiences. Are they right?

#1 Yes, general audiences are either homophobic or uninterested in films with gay themes.

#2 No, audiences will buy a good story whether it is straight or gay.

#3 I'm not sure.

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than we were in parts of the movie," says Ed Saxon, who coproduced the film with Demme. "But we were worried that if Antonio [Banderas] and Tom [Hanks] had kissed, then that would have become the subject of the movie, as opposed to AIDS discrimination. Our mission was to take people a place in caring for a gay protagonist where they hadn't gone before, at least in a Hollywood film."

Most Hollywood producers, however, are not so idealistic. Their refrain that Hollywood is, after all, a business "The studios are not thinking money at all," says Kleiser. "I think it comes down to economics: The studios have not seen any movie that had two men kissing that has made what they consider real money." When they do, suggests, gay films will hit the big time—uncensored. ●

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